

## Claims

1. A protective helmet comprising a rigid shell, which has a central region and an outer periphery, a suspension system, which is mounted within the rigid shell and which is adapted to suspend the protective helmet on a wearer's head, and an array of inflatable pads, which are carried by the suspension system, between the central region and the outer periphery, and which are adapted to provide cushioning between the suspension system and the wearer's head.

2. The protective helmet of claim 1, wherein the suspension system comprises straps mounted within the rigid shell, at spaced intervals around a lower periphery of the rigid shell, each strap extending downwardly and outwardly toward the outer periphery and extending oppositely toward a central region within the rigid shell, and wherein the array of inflatable pads includes pads disposed between the straps, between the central region and the lower periphery.

3. The protective helmet of claim 1, wherein the inflatable pads are joined by a fabric sheet.

4. The protective helmet of claim 2, wherein the inflatable pads are joined by a fabric sheet and wherein the straps extend through slits in the fabric sheet.

5. The protective helmet of claim 1, wherein the inflatable pads are joined by and between two fabric sheets.

6. The protective helmet of claim 2, wherein the inflatable pads are joined by and between two fabric sheets and wherein the straps extend through slits in the fabric sheets.

7. The protective helmet of claim 5, wherein the straps extend through slits in the fabric sheets.

8. The protective helmet of claim 1, wherein the inflatable pads include a pad disposed in the central region.

9. The protective helmet of claim 8, wherein the inflatable pads are joined by a fabric sheet.

5        10. The protective helmet of claim 1, wherein the pads are disposed directly below the straps.

11. The protective helmet of any one of claims 1 through 10, wherein each pad contains an inflated bladder.